

The Truth Commission and the Colombian Armed Forces

One of the most commonly fraught relationships in a country's political transition is the relationship between a Truth Commission and the Armed Forces. In Argentina, the Armed Forces denied the findings of the Never Again report and promoted their own independent version of what happened during the dictatorship. In Peru, the Army spoke out firmly against the Truth Commission's final report, suggesting it was favouring the "terrorists" and in Guatemala, the Armed Forces continuously opposed the Truth Commission from the beginning of its mandate to the very end.

The Colombian case however, seems to point to a different outcome. As Eduardo Pizarro, Emeritus Professor of the National University of Colombia and Former Ambassador of Colombia in the Hague, suggests, the Colombian case could be the first political transition to have a positive relationship between the Truth Commission and the Armed Forces. This Snapshot analyses the relationship between the Truth Commission and the Colombian Armed Forces.

The Appointment of the Retired Army Major Carlos Ospina as a Truth Commissioner

Carlos Ospina, a lawyer and a retired army Major, has been leading the Colombian Association of Military Victims of the Armed Conflict since 2013. Ospina is the commissioner in charge of the truth clarification exercises throughout the central Andean region, comprising the departments of Boyacá, Cundinamarca, Tolima, and Huila. He is responsible for three Casas de la Verdad (Truth Houses) and has led strategies to bring together civil authorities with those in the Reincorporation Areas (ETCR) in several municipalities in Tolima, to facilitate the inclusion of concerns of former FARC fighters in local development plans. However, his most important role is to be a bridge between the Commission and the Armed Forces.

The Contribution of the Armed Forces to the Truth Commission

The relationship between the Colombian Armed Forces and the Truth Commission is defined by the military's interest in contributing to the Commission, and the Commission's willingness to receive these contributions. In October 2018, at the very start of the Truth Commission's mandate, the Armed Forces submitted the Genesis report to the Commission, a set of 50 volumes describing the violations of international humanitarian law committed by the FARC guerrilla group from the perspective of the Armed Forces.

In April 2019, the Truth Commission held its first meeting with the Armed Forces Active Reserves Centre of Analysis. The Centre submitted reports discussing the origins of the conflict, and the meeting sought to analyse how the Truth Commission could benefit from this knowledge of the Colombian conflict.



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In November 2019, the Armed Forces' Comprehensive Judicial Department submitted the Lights for the Truth report to the Commission. The document is made up of 8 sub-reports setting out 19 cases involving acts of violence committed by the FARC against the military and their family members. It covers incidents that occurred in the Magdalena Medio region, Catatumbo, El Paramillo, Meta, Tolima, Cauca, Nariño, Valle del Cauca, and Orinoquía. It also explores the guerrillas' recruitment of child soldiers.

The Commission has been receptive to the content of the reports submitted by the Armed Forces and Francisco de Roux, the President of the Commission, has acknowledged the existence of military victims. After reviewing the Lights for the Truth report, he stated that, "the report shows the pain suffered by the families of military personnel, a level of suffering experienced by very few families. We invite you to continue helping us with more testimonies".

The Discussion of the Role of the Armed Forces in the Armed Conflict

The Truth Commission and the Armed Forces have also shared the stage at public and private forums. In February 2020, the Armed Forces and Truth Commission Symposium was held at the Javeriana University in Bogotá. According to the Commission, the symposium was critical to creating stronger bonds between both institutions.

Since the symposium, the Truth Commission has held at least three private meetings to establish a direct dialogue with the Armed Forces, all of which have been led by Commissioner Carlos Ospina. The first of these meetings focused on military intelligence, the second looked at institutional transformation within the armed forces, and the third considered issues such as the National Security Doctrine, and the Internal Enemy Doctrine. The purpose of such meetings is to inform the Commission's researchers of the nuances of the military's involvement in the armed conflict. They also provide a vital opportunity to establish a meaningful and productive dialogue leading to a more diverse and complete understanding of the past.

Embrace Dialogue calls attention to the contribution of the Colombian Armed Forces to the Truth Commission and praises the Truth Commission's openness in listening to and allowing the active participation of the Armed Forces. We invite Colombian society to recognise the progress made by the Truth Commission in documenting testimonies from all those affected by the armed conflict.



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